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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

U. S. KITCHEN NO. 1 (A tour through the White House Kitchen)

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, December 19, 1935.

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MR. SALISBURY: Miss Van Deman, here we are just 6 days away from Christmas dinner. What does that mean to the guardian of the Household Calendar?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Plenty, sir, plenty. Yes, that really leaves us only four cooking days between now and Christmas, counting out Sunday.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, I'm sure that lots of Christmas comestibles can be cooked up in four days. You know, come Christmas, a healthy man's fancy just naturally turns to thoughts of mince pie and plum pudding. You talked about roast turkey last week, so I thought maybe ----

MISS VAN DEMAN: Oh, I get it. You thought maybe I was going on to the dessert course this week. Dinner on the progressive plan. Turkey one week, plum pudding the next. Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it's the kitchen itself I'm going to talk about today. Everybody who's ever cooked knows that the better planned, better equipped kitchen is, the easier it is to turn out a Christmas dinner perfect from soup to nuts.

My special reason for talking about kitchens today is that I've just had the pleasure of going through the new kitchen at the White House. As you know by the papers, Mrs. Roosevelt took the members of her press conference all through the service end of the White House on Monday. Beside the kitchen itself, we saw the pantries, the storerooms, the refrigerators, the housekeeper's office, the dining room where members of the housekeeping staff have their meals, and the little sitting room where they can relax and rest for a few minutes when they're off duty.

Of course we were impressed by the magnificent new stove and all the other electric equipment, by the spotless walls, by the cheerful green linoleum on the floors. And the polished stainless steel table tops and work counters, and the abundance of cupboard space, they pleased the housewifely soul of every one of us on this tour of America's No. 1 kitchen. Naturally, we were expecting to find the latest thing in mechanical devices and we were not disappointed.

But what struck me more than all the mechanical gadgets and the shining surfaces was the thought and the care that had evidently gone in to making this part of the White House more comfortable and convenient for the men and women who work there out of sight of the diplomats and others in that never-ending procession of visitors to the White House functions. As Mrs. Roosevelt reminded us, the arrangements even now are far short of ideal. But they are the best the architects were able to devise. After all, the White House is like any other old building. When you start remodeling you can't exactly pick up the foundation walls and shift them around to make rooms of just the shape and size you'd like to have. You have to improve on the old as best you can, and let it go at that. And according to reports there was just as much room for improvement in the old kitchen in the Executive Mansion on Pennsylvania Avenue as there is in some of the kitchens in our own homes, on the farm or out on Main Street anywhere.

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Before the remodeling, the cooks and the kitchen helpers at the White House had to do a great deal of leg work in the course of getting a meal for the President's table. They stooped and lifted till their backs were tired because the stove and worktables and the sinks weren't placed in compact units and set at the most efficient height.

Now everything is very different. Every piece of equipment in the new White House kitchen is there because it is needed for a definite purpose. And every piece is placed where it can be used most efficiently to do a job quickly and easily, without confusion.

Of course, in the Presidential household the meal schedule is subject to change without notice. But when the President is ready for his dinner, the dinner must be ready for the President. So the big electric range is equipped with some rapid heating coils especially designed for speedy cooking. There are also provisions for keeping food hot, and we saw a specially built, heavily insulated cabinet for sending the President's luncheon over to his desk in the Executive Offices. It stood at only about an arm's length from the stove, so that the cook could broil a chop and slip it into the cabinet without a waste motion.

Besides all this carefully chosen equipment, grouped into work centers, I noticed the lighting of the room. At best, there can be very little daylight in the White House kitchen. But electric lights placed behind ground glass over the stove and sink and worktables, illuminate the whole place with a pleasant white light. Nobody working in that kitchen stands in his own shadow. The smooth painted walls, cream color I'd call them, also help to diffuse the light.

And that's another idea that we can duplicate in our own home kitchens, sometimes at no cost at all -- that is, better arrangement of lights to save eye strain and extra steps. Maybe the man of the house would like to take that on as his Christmas present to the family. I know some people think that Christmas presents should be ornamental rather than utilitarian. Well, I don't agree. I'd rather have a new light over the kitchen sink or some fresh paint on the wall than a whole raft of white elephants taking up good space on the closet shelf year after year.

And so saying, let me wish you luck with your Christmas cooking and Merry Christmas to you all.